



## Communist University Introductions

*These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.*

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### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 6



[Ousmane Sembène, 1923 - 2007](#)

## Ousmane Sembène

The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, when the majority of African former colonies regained their national sovereignty, were also the boom years for the paperback book-publishing business worldwide.

Companies such as Penguin Books and Heinemann popularised many African authors in English or in English translation during this time.

[Ousmane Sembène](#)'s 1960 “[God's Bits of Wood](#)”, written in French and first published only 15 years after the end of the anti-fascist world war, has an

outstanding place in the history of the African revolutionary novel. The download linked below contains characteristic extracts from the novel.

As you will see later in this course, Ngugi wa Thiong'o mentioned "God's Bits of Wood" in the final chapter of his great novel "Petals of Blood", and also in his famous critical essay "The Writer in a Neo-colonial State".

The novel is about a strike among railway workers on the line between Dakar, Senegal, and Bamako, Mali, in the time of the French colonial empire, and is based on a real strike that took place in 1947. It is a wonderful story, full of characterisation, events and atmosphere. It is optimistic and full of hope. Large parts of "[God's Bits of Wood](#)" can be read on [Google Books](#).

Ousmane Sembène was also an outstanding film-maker. According to his Wikipedia entry, "he realized that his written works would only be read by a small cultural elite in his native land. He therefore decided at age 40 to become a film maker, in order to reach wider African audiences." For similar reasons, Ngugi was later to return to writing in his native language, Kikuyu.

Ousmane Sembène died in his eighties, in 2007.

Did the African writers create a "*genre*"? At least one could say that they were typically open and keen to portray life and personalities as they were. They represented a revolutionary, generally optimistic (but sometimes tinged with disillusion) popular imagination that was widespread in those years, at least among African intellectuals. One of the highlights of those years was "FESTAC", The Second World African Festival of Arts and Culture, held in Nigeria in 1977, where the young Fela Kuti played, among others.

Is there continuity today? No. It is not the same today. Culture is now more "globalised", as a result of a reactionary, neo-liberal offensive. The paperback book does not have the same high place in popular culture as it did in the past. The sense of a general African anti-Imperialist popular cultural wave has lost some of its momentum, for the time being.

But we are working on the problems! And Ousmane Sembène's masterpiece, "God's Bits of Wood", remains an inspiration to us.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Ousmane Sembène, God's Bits of Wood, extracts, 1960](#).



[Ngugi wa Thiong'o](#)

## Ngugi wa Thiong'o

### Ngugi the Novelist

The **attached** document is the final Chapter of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's great novel, "Petals of Blood".

Like Ousmane Sembène's masterpiece, "God's Bits of Wood", "Petals of Blood" is a novel of struggle, with many characters. The last chapter debriefs the main characters, one by one.

"God's Bits of Wood" was set in the past. "Petals of Blood" imagines a future, or a sequel to independence, a kind of "development", in various senses of the word. The imaginary new town of "Ilmorog" becomes a patchwork, or a concretisation, of different elements of Kenya life in the time of neo-colonialism.

Ngugi was detained without trial in 1977 for a year. Even in his fictional work it is clear that Ngugi is a committed revolutionary, with quite a thorough grasp of revolutionary theory.

This is one of many books of Ngugi's, and Ngugi is one of many African writers. Those who were relatively more artistic and less politically organised have also been a strong part of the liberation movement.

In this series of ours, Eduardo Mondlane's writing has already shown how significant have been the artistic productions in the anti-colonial struggles.

In the neo-colonial anti-imperialist struggle the artists are equally as crucial, and perhaps, as writers, they are under even greater pressure.

A new generation of anti-imperialist artists and writers is now needed.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, extract, 1977.](#)

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#### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 6b



[Alex La Guma, 1925-1985](#)

## Alex La Guma

Among the revolutionary writers of Africa, the South African novelist Alex La Guma started relatively early. He was only two years younger than Ousmane Sembène (and he died 22 years before Sembène).

The attached document contains two chapters from La Guma's 1972 book "In the Fog of the Season's End". Clearly it is a struggle novel: tough, realistic and committed.

Alex La Guma's works included **A Walk in the Night** and **Other Stories**, (1962), **And a Threefold Cord** (1964), **The Stone-Country** (1967), **In the Fog of the Season's End** (1972), **A Soviet Journey** (1978), **Time of the Butcherbird** (1979).

Alex La Guma was the son of the outstanding South African revolutionary [James La Guma](#), a member of the Communist Party of South Africa from the year that his son Alex was born – 1925.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of work like this in the liberation struggle. It is work that leaves no doubt. The reader is compelled. As much as, or more than, the propaganda output of the liberation movement, the communist parties, and the anti-apartheid solidarity movements in the world, novels such as these planted an anchor for the struggle that could not be shifted.

These books need to be read; and new books need to be written, songs sung, pictures painted, et cetera, et cetera, to anchor the struggle again in such a way that it cannot be doubted. This is what Alex La Guma, among other novelists, did. He anchored the revolution in the hearts of the people.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Alex La Guma, In the Fog of the Season's End, extract, 1972.](#)

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#### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 6c



[Ngugi wa Thiong'o](#)

# Ngugi wa Thiong'o (again)

## Ngugi the Academic

Ngugi's (**attached**) essay "The Writer in a Neo-colonial State", first published in 1986 in a publication called "The Black Scholar", and subsequently as part of the 1993 book "Moving the Centre", helps this project of ours considerably. Ngugi taught at Nairobi University and later in the USA. Therefore as much as he is a novelist, he has also been an academic.

In this essay Ngugi takes a long look back over the period from the end of the Second World War, and divides it roughly into three - the fifties, the sixties, and the seventies; liberation struggle; victory and independence; and neo-colonialist reaction. He considers the way that the literature affected these passages of history, and was affected by them.

We have not used such a scheme, nor did we start with the Second World War, but Ngugi's overview does correspond with our series to an extent. Clearly, in nearly all the countries of Africa, neo-colonialism has taken hold, and maintained its grip. Ngugi problematised this in his way, and so have we, in our way.

In 2011, a quarter of a century after Ngugi's essay was written, an African country – Libya – was attacked by the imperialists with full-scale military force, bombed, shelled, rocketed and invaded. Libya was the first country in Africa to become independent after the world wars, and it was the only one to have achieved parity, in its general standard of living, with the European countries on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea from Africa.

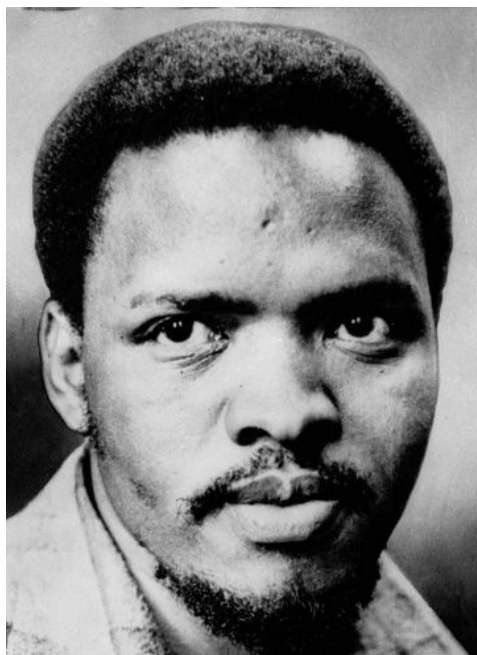
Now Libya is being catastrophically underdeveloped. Neo-colonialism is still with us, but now armed, brutal, direct, naked colonialism is back, as well.

Ngugi concludes: "as the struggle continues and intensifies, the lot of the writer in a neo-colonial state will become harder and not easier."

This is our lot. For as much as heroes have gone before, and for as much as the written record is priceless and indispensable, yet we who remain will have to do it all again, and in conditions of even greater difficulty. We have no right to expect less, or to expect less of ourselves.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The Writer in a Neo-colonial State, 1993.](#)





[Bantu Stephen Biko, 1946-1977](#)

## Bantu Stephen Biko

A shocking proportion of the revolutionary writers whom we are featuring in this African Revolutionary Writers series were assassinated by the Imperialist enemy. These include Eduardo Mondlane, Amilcar Cabral and Ruth First; Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Patrice Lumumba; and still to come in the series, Huey Newton, Thomas Sankara, Walter Rodney and Muammar Gaddafi.

Steve Biko is another one of the revolutionary intellectuals who were cold-bloodedly killed by the guilty ones who could not bear the power of his words and the frankness of his accusations. We honour him, and are sure that he will always be honoured in South Africa and in the world.

Many books, films and songs have been made about Steve Biko. There is a [Steve Biko Foundation](#), and a [Steve Biko Memorial Lecture](#) is given each year by a famous person.

According to the Steve Biko Foundation web site, Biko was “among a breed of African thinkers universally who include W.E.B. Dubois, Aime Cesaire, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Cheik Anta Diop, Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon, among others.” All of these are included in our African Revolutionary Writers series, and so is Steve Biko. But was Biko the same as these others, and

even if so, was he different to others again who are not on the Steve Biko Foundation's list, or even on ours?

In other words: Having honoured Biko, how do we read him critically? How do we place him? Biko's present-day supporter, Xolela Mangcu, has recently called Biko "South Africa's philosopher leader – but not philosopher king". But if Steve Biko was a philosopher, he might have been expected to develop a comprehensive philosophical system, as Hegel or Kant did, for example. But Biko, whose famous, but short, collection of articles and speeches is called "[I Write What I Like](#)", did not actually like to write much, and did not attempt to write a general philosophy, or any other kind of dedicated book-length work for that matter.

The amount of Biko's writing that is available on the Internet appears to be limited to the main text linked below, which is a transcript of an interview that he did with the US scholar Gail Gerhart. In this interview, answering Gerhart's question about the origins of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Biko says:

*"... others of course are much more avid readers than I am. They do a lot of reading, they do a lot of writing, interpretation, and so on. So that element has that kind of effect. What I'm saying is that it's a complementary effect upon a basic attitude formed primarily from experience, from an analysis of the situation as one sees it."*

Asked about PAC leader Robert Sobukwe, Biko says: *"I have never heard him express an opinion about the details of the ideology, which makes him again a very admirable guy. Unlike ANC ranks and other ranks, his major concern is about continued opposition to the system... There's no more PAC, there's no more ANC; there's just the struggle. And this is the kind of ideology that they're talking."*

This looks as if what Biko had in mind was an ideology of no ideology, and a movement of activism without much writing.

Right at the end, Biko concludes:

*"... the growth of the townships in the pattern that they are now growing makes communication also all that much easier. Communication not necessarily through shared platforms, shared meetings and so on, but communication of ideas through a shared, common stimulus. Because everybody has to stay in a specific area. I'm talking here mainly about the African population. If I go to Jo'burg I know automatically, I don't have to*



*choose: I just have to go and stay in Soweto, whether I could afford a house in Lower Houghton or not.*

*“So this thing of talking for or on behalf of the masses is nonsense, because you live with them, you stay with them; you make your inputs primarily because you are there, and no physical distance or intellectual distance is ultimately created. A guy who's a priest or a teacher or something like this in an area is forced by circumstances to relate to the neighbors that society has created for him. He doesn't choose neighbors. So that he carves his place in that community. Alright, he might be regarded as a man of major import, primarily because he can put several words together much faster than anybody else, but the important thing is that even he himself sees himself as a member of that community. And in this whole conscientization program, this is what makes ideas so easily flow across amongst people; this common ghetto experience that blacks are subjected to.”*

It's difficult not to recognise, in this final passage, the preferred classlessness of the middle classes, which is a version of the very same liberalism (though in that case it was the white variety) that Biko rejected so emphatically in life, and explicitly in the earlier parts of this particular interview.

Ngugi wrote, of the early literature of African liberation: *“Were there classes in Africa? No! cried the nationalist politician, and the writer seemed to echo him.”* (The Writer in a Neo-Colonial State, 1986)

If the intellectual, as well as *“a priest or a teacher”*, or Xolela Mangcu or Julius Malema for that matter, or Fikile Mbalula the proponent of *“vibrancy”*; if all of these can take for granted that they are at one with the masses, with no *“intellectual distance”* from the masses, then the problem of the alienation of the intellectual is solved, the vanguard and the mass are one, and no special *“Pedagogy of the Oppressed”* will be required.

This is where the Communist University finds itself differing with the martyr Steve Biko, with all due respect to his memory. The problem of class is a real one - just as real as the problem of race. The problem of pedagogy is a real one. The nature of the vanguard is a problem, yes, but the vanguard is still a necessity. The nature of neo-colonialism, based on class, is a real problem.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Steve Biko, Interview with Gail Gerhart, 24 October 1972](#).**



[Cheikh Anta Diop, 1923-1986](#)

## Cheikh Anta Diop

Cheikh Anta Diop, a Senegalese nuclear physicist, studied in Paris from 1946 until his return to Senegal in 1960.

In 1951 Diop submitted a thesis in which he argued, correctly, that ancient Egypt was African and not some other thing. After a struggle, he received a doctorate for this work in 1960.

The problem had been that among ancient civilisations, such as those of Mesopotamia, Persia, Mycenae and Greece, that of Egypt was by far the oldest. All of them could be treated as “white”, and racists did so. But in fact Egypt was clearly not “white” in any real sense. It was African, and closely related to black Africa, perhaps even more so then, than it is now.

With his insistence on the African-ness of Ancient Egypt, Diop triumphed. No doubt the prejudice remains, and especially outside of the realm of science it remains. But Diop’s work stands and will stand for ever more.

Diop wrote a number of books on African culture and civilization, of which “[Civilisation or Barbarism](#)” (1981) was the last full work published. Please download the extract from that book, linked below.

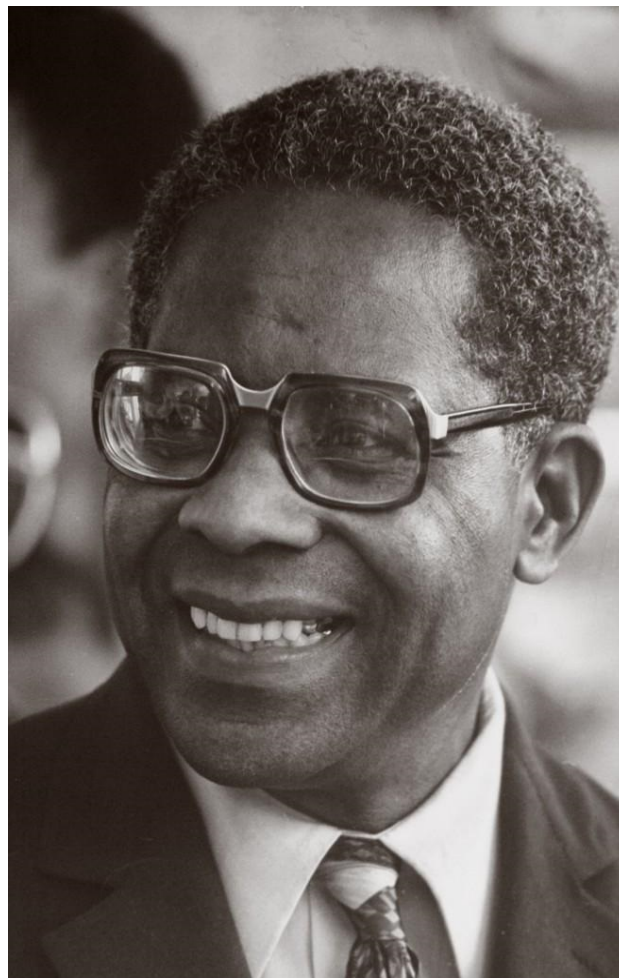
The extract has been chosen to represent Diop's characteristic line of enquiry, and to show the respect that he had for philosophy, and for the necessity of philosophy.

But what is also clear from the book is that Diop was a scholar of Marxist literature. The title of the book is borrowed from Chapter Nine of Frederick Engels' "Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State". This book is not separate from, but is a continuation of, Marxist scholarship. Cheikh Anta Diop was undoubtedly a revolutionary intellectual as well as a writer of Africa.

In Dakar, Senegal, there is an entire University named after Cheikh Anta Diop. In Yeoville, Johannesburg there is a school named after him. He is one of the legendary scholars of Africa.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Cheikh Anta Diop, Civilisation or Barbarism, 1981.](#)
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#### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 7b



[Aimé Césaire, 1913-2008](#)

# Aimé Césaire

In any research of African writers, the name of Aimé Césaire crops up constantly. He was one of the early ones, giving an example to others. Like Frantz Fanon, he was born on the island of Martinique in the Caribbean, and he taught Fanon when Fanon was a boy.

Like many other writers who are part of the African Revolutionary heritage, Aimé Césaire's original writing is hard to find on the Internet. Thus the fact that his Discourse on Colonialism [is available on the Internet](#) is a great good fortune.

Whatever else, it is a wonderful piece of writing, and thoroughly class-conscious. For example, Césaire writes:

"It is a fact: the *nation* is a bourgeois phenomenon."

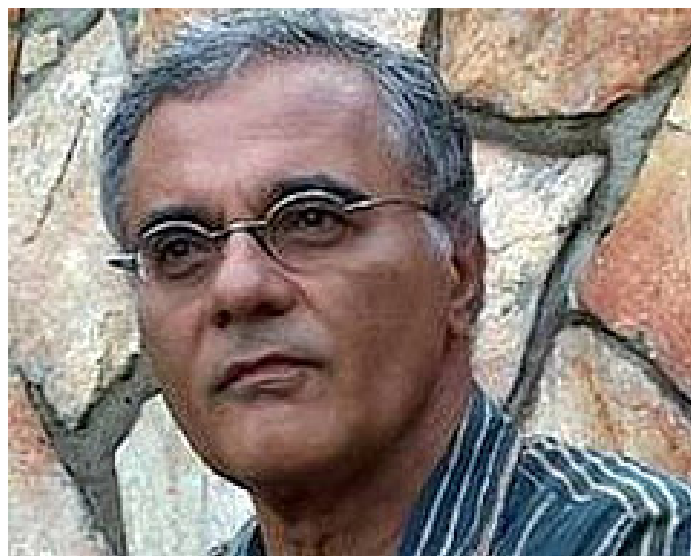
This is a simple statement of a fact that dozens of other writers, who should have seen it, have failed to note.

Have a treat. Read Aimé Césaire's "Discourse on Colonialism" now, for pleasure as much as for political profit. This is the Francophonie at its best.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, 1955, [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#).**

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African Revolutionary Writers, Part 7c



[Mahmood Mamdani](#)

# Mahmood Mamdani

What remains for us in this part is an extract from Mahmood Mamdani's "Citizen and Subject" (**attached**, and also downloadable below).

Like Issa Shivji and Walter Rodney, both of whom we will come to later in our course, Professor Mamdani is a product of the famous Dar-es-Salaam campus. He is now head of the [Makerere Institute of Social Research](#) (MISR) in his native Uganda.

Note that Mamdani's sense of the word "subject" in this work is different and opposite from the one usually found in communist literature. Here it means a subordinate person, as opposed to a free person.

It is typical of the English language that, just when you need certainty, it gives you ambiguity. Mamdani is referring to the "subjects" of a king or of a feudal lord or "traditional leader".

## **Neo-colonial class alliance**

In the book, Mamdani's principal insight is to recognise the class alliance typically sought by the Imperialists in neo-colonial Africa countries. In other words, whereas the partisans of the working class and other anti-Imperialists will form a National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance of certain classes and fractions of classes, the Imperialists will seek a countervailing alliance of their own, and it is the nature of this pro-Imperialist, neo-colonial alliance that Mamdani probes.

According to Mamdani, the Imperialists prefer to ally with the most backward rural feudal elements, commonly called "traditional leaders" or "chiefs" in Africa, in opposition to the modernising bourgeoisie and proletariat of the cities and towns.

Mamdani regards South Africa as the classic case in this regard, although he quotes many other examples. Mamdani's analysis stands in contrast with common presumptions about the existence of a sellout or "comprador" bourgeoisie allied to the Imperialists in Africa.

This other theory says that the Imperialist monopoly-capitalists tend to work through the "compradors", who are local aspirant bourgeoisie, or bourgeoisie-for-rent, and who do the Imperialists' work for them.

Such compradors do exist, and clearly they are seen to exist in South Africa. Yet Mamdani's scheme reflects the facts and the history of Imperialism better, at least up to now.

Imperialism is in general hostile to the national bourgeoisie.

The typical neo-colonial war of recent decades, including the Iraq war, and the recolonisation of Libya, is a war of Imperialism against a national bourgeoisie that wants national sovereignty and control over its country's national resources.

In the light of this analysis it becomes easier to see why it is that the South African proletariat has long been, via the ANC, in alliance with parts of its national bourgeoisie, for national liberation, against the monopoly-capitalist oppressors with their Imperialist-globalist links.

The Imperialists make a marriage of convenience with the most retrogressive social power that they can find – tribalism – in a pact to hold Africa where it was under colonialism, i.e. partly rich, but mostly dirt poor.

In Mamdani's view, backed with data, it is the feudals who have betrayed Africa and not the African bourgeoisie, whether called "comprador" or anything else. In Swaziland today, we can see a perfect example of this. In Swaziland, the "comprador" is, literally, the king .

In South Africa the Imperialists relied heavily on Bantustan leaders, and especially on the Inkatha Freedom Party, but the ANC was able to form better links with the rural as well as with the urban masses - thus achieving a liberation class alliance that could, and did, dominate the country in terms of its mass support.

The (national) Bourgeois and Proletarians are the modernisers and the democrats, who are compelled by necessity to combine together to fight against the feudals for the democracy that forms the nation.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Mahmood Mamdani, Linking the Urban and the Rural, 1996](#).**
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[C L R James, 1901 – 1989](#)

## C L R James

[C L R James](#) was the author of “[The Black Jacobins](#)”, about the 1791 revolution that created what is regarded as the world’s first independent black republic, in Haiti. James also wrote about the game of [cricket](#), and the social consequences of cricket. He was a great writer, and a revolutionary writer.

James was also, often in his long life, a political actor, together with, among others, his fellow-Trinidadian [George Padmore](#) in the 1930s in London, then later with the Socialist Workers’ Party in the USA from 1938 to 1953, and then back in London and in his native Trinidad, West Indies. James died a famous and a well-respected man, although he had annoyed plenty of people along the way. But perhaps he was still under-appreciated as the great political intellectual that he was.

The attached and linked downloadable text given below is from C L R James’s 1948 work on [G W F Hegel](#), called “Notes on Dialectics”. It can serve in this series to show that the ability of the revolutionary writers to challenge the bourgeoisie at the frontier of philosophy is crucial, and that African revolutionaries have not been shy to do so, as difficult as this task may be.

James says in the second paragraph of this text that “The larger Logic is the most difficult book I know” (meaning the book that is more often referred to as Hegel’s “Greater Logic”).

[Lenin](#) wrote that “It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!” Naturally, this applies to Africans as well.

The last great hurdle of Marxist study is Marx's own master, Hegel. How well did James do in tackling it? [Raya Dunayevskaya](#), the former secretary to Leon Trotsky, [writing in 1972](#) when James was still very much alive, did not think much of his work on Hegel. She accused him of “skipping”!

But for us, as beginners, James is a great help with Hegel, and is maybe just what we need. He gives us a way in (and so does Andy Blunden with his “[Hegel by Hypertext](#)”). James himself gives an adequate answer to Dunayevskaya in the very text that we are using today: “I am not giving a summary of the *Logic*. I am not expanding it as a doctrine. I am using it and showing how to begin to know it and use it.” This is what we want: an opening (in French: *ouverture*).

African revolutionary theory and practice cannot be separated from the world's general revolutionary history, neither chronologically, nor geographically, nor in relative sophistication. Nor can it be said that one is derivative of the other. To say so, is to display ignorance. Because is precisely when the African revolutionary heritage is looked at, that this inseparability becomes apparent.

On MIA there is a **C L R James Archive** at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/index.htm>.

We have chosen, for the purposes of this section, to take a sample of C L R James on Hegel. But in terms of the African Revolutionary Writers Series as a whole we would equally benefit from the following items that are in the MIA James Archive:

- [Black Power, 1967](#)
- [Reflections on Pan-Africanism, 1973](#)
- [Walter Rodney and the Question of Power, 1981](#)

These articles are to a large extent reflections by James on the interplay of revolutionary literature with the mass political movements that changed the African political landscape in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

They can therefore be read as reinforcing, or contrasting with, the remarks of Eduardo Mondlane, Amilcar Cabral, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and soon to come, Walter Rodney, that we have used for this course. You may also take all of these articles as

validating the editorial choices and comments that have been used in the construction of this course; or alternatively you may regard them as a good exposure of the inadequacies of this course.

Either way, it is the problematisation of all these overviews of the literature which can be educational, especially if problematisation is followed by face-to-face or e-mail dialogue and discussion.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [C L R James, The Hegelian Logic, 1948](#).

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#### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 8a



[Angela Davis](#)

## Angela Davis

Angela Davis is well known, but hard to summarise. She is a scholar. She is also a holder of the Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union, and she was twice a Vice-Presidential candidate on behalf of the CPUSA.

[This link](#) takes you to an interview that Angela Davis did with Gary Younge of the Guardian (London) in 2007, during a trip which also took her to Johannesburg, as recorded by the [CU here](#).

[This link](#) takes you to the Angela Davis page on Wikipedia, where as usual there are more links, at the bottom of the page.

Chapter 13 from Angela Davis's 1981 book, *Women, Race and Class* (**attached**) is to a large extent a polemic against the Wages for Housework Movement of that time, led by Mariarosa Dalla Costa in Italy. Davis makes an orthodox Marxist defence against a kind of anarchism or liberalism. Naturally, this does not mean that Davis has always been orthodox, any more than C L R James was always orthodox.

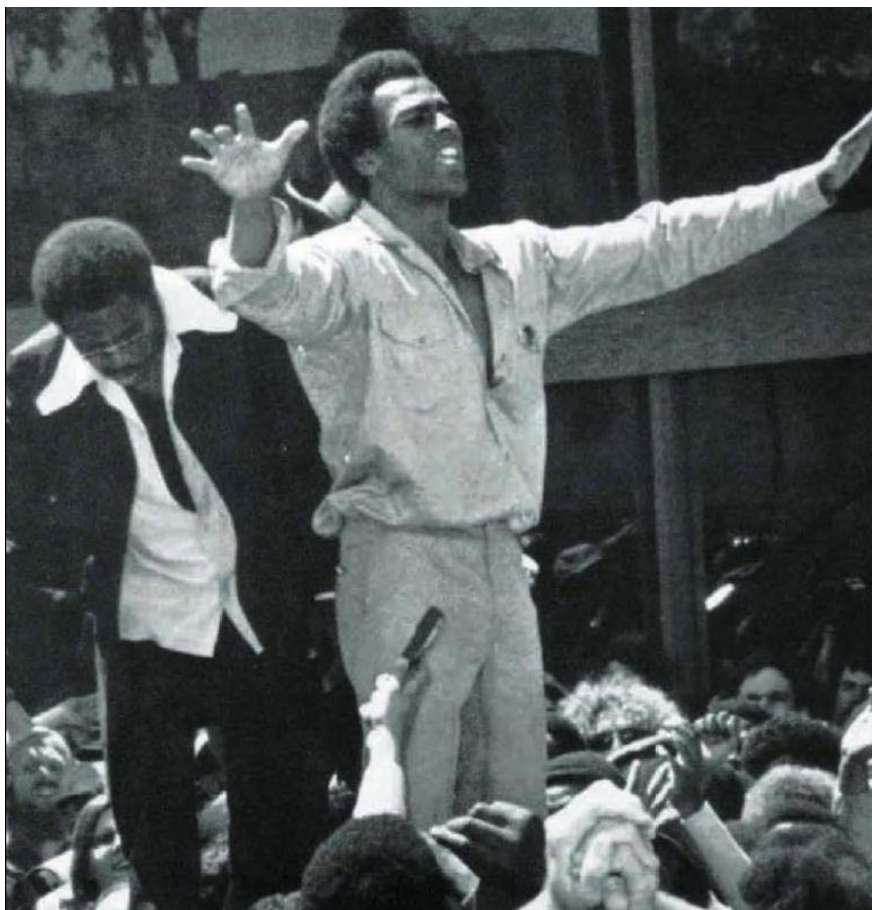
In this text, Davis tackles the matter of housework first, arguing for a communist solution to the drudgery of child care, domestic cleaning, food preparation, and laundry.

She shows that the current situation of women is historically recent in origin, and that the repression of women coincides, in the historical development of human society, with the appearance of private property, quoting Engels' "[Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State](#)". Davis reports on her 1973 interaction with the Masai people of Tanzania, where there was still division of labour between the sexes that was "complementary as opposed to hierarchical," according to Davis.

Davis recounts, in her own way, the nature of the capitalist wages system, where money is only paid for the survival or continued availability of labour power, and nothing at all is paid for the expropriated product of labour. Davis also records aspects of the South African apartheid system of exploitation, which was still in full force at that time.

In her concluding paragraph Davis says: *"The only significant steps toward ending domestic slavery have in fact been taken in the existing socialist countries."* In other words, wages-for-housework is an ineffective gimmick. The real solution to women's problems in society can only come from changing society through the democratic organisation of women in the same kind of way as workers are organised, so that their women's organisation is a component of democracy, and is not outside of democracy.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Angela Davis, Women, Race and Class, C13, Work and Housework, 1981](#).
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[Dr Huey P Newton, 1942-1989](#)

## Huey P Newton

Reading the original works of revolutionary writers means getting around and past all the commentators and analysts and academic secondary writers who would want to tell their readers what to think of the primary sources, usually without offering more than a few short quotations from any primary source.

Consequently, reading the original works is apt to result in a re-evaluation, either upwards, or downwards.

In the case of Dr Huey P Newton and The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense which Newton co-founded with [Bobby Seale](#) in October 1966, and of which Newton was the main ideologue, the re-evaluation is definitely upwards.

In the early days of the BPP, Newton was the “Minister of Defense” while Eldridge Cleaver became the “Minister of Information” for the party. This made sense insofar as the BPP was for Defence, and so Defence was the senior position. But in practice, Newton was still the thinker of the BPP. Cleaver was only interested in

armed struggle. But Cleaver was often seen as the mouthpiece, until he fled to Algeria in 1968. Cleaver ended up as a supporter of the right wing of the US Republican Party.

The BPP was under constant attack, mainly as a consequence of the activities of [COINTELPRO](#), a part of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), organised to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize" political targets of which most were black or communist organisations.

*'COINTELPRO began in 1956 and was initially designed to "increase factionalism, cause disruption and win defections" inside the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA),' says Wikipedia.*

In short, there were political conflicts within the BPP, and between the BPP and other organisations, which had a real basis; and there were other disagreements and conflicts, even armed conflicts resulting in many deaths, that were the consequence of US government action against a political party, the BPP.

This is the USA and how it works. Some say it has changed. Some say it has not changed.

The attached document (also linked for download) shows Huey Newton to have been a sophisticated political thinker with theory, strategy and tactics that were fitted to the times and the circumstances. He promoted a Ten-Point Plan that, as he said, was *"not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. It is a survival program."* And he proposed a classless society and a world that would be communist.

It seems clear that Huey Newton was not a terrorist and that he had every intention of helping to organise the oppressed black people of the USA into primary mass organisations for their survival and self-defence. As such, he was going to be more effective than any terrorist. The BPP was a serious political party. It is surprising to read about such things existing in the USA, but of course it is possible, and it has always been possible.

To download the **Huey P. Newton Reader** (55MB PDF), [Click Here](#).

The Dr Huey P Newton Foundation web site is at <http://www.blackpanther.org/>.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Huey P Newton, Speech at Boston College, 1970](#).





Colonel Gaddafi as he was

## Muammar Gaddafi

[Muammar Gaddafi](#) led a small group of junior military officers in a bloodless *coup d'état* in Libya against the pro-Imperialist King Idris on 1 September 1969. When the second annual edition of this course went out Gaddafi was still the leader of his country. In the third edition we had to note that Muammar Gaddafi was now dead, having been murdered by counter-revolutionaries, like so many others of our African Revolutionary writers.

Libya is a large African country on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, West of Egypt and East of Tunisia. One used to say that Libya was much more developed than in colonial times. But now Libya has been “underdeveloped” again in a catastrophic way.



Gaddafi and Mandela

We will still take Muammar Gaddafi as a writer. Writing transcends human mortality.

Gaddafi's 1975 "Green Book", and especially the part on "Democracy", is a very useful text for discussion in study circles, because it does not take bourgeois democracy for granted, but interrogates it, criticises it severely and to a considerable extent, rejects it. This document is attached.

Gaddafi was certainly an African Revolutionary Writer. In the other, much more recent piece for the New York Times, attached and linked below, Gaddafi set out a plain case for the "One-State Solution" in Palestine, which is the same in principal as South Africa's post-apartheid one-state solution ("One person one vote in a unitary state"). This document is also attached.



**Muammar Gaddafi more recently**

Muammar Gaddafi was a wise and humble Muslim man of great energy, in spite of the sorrows that he personally had to bear. He was loved by the revolutionaries of Africa.

Between the first and second versions of this introduction, Libya was bombed and invaded by forces of Britain, France and the USA. One of Gaddafi's sons and one of his grandchildren had been killed. This was on top of the daughter killed in the raid organised by Reagan and Thatcher in 1986. The Wikipedia entry on Muammar Gaddafi had been re-written to conform with Western propaganda.

Muammar Gaddafi did not retreat or run away. He stayed and faced his terrible death.

We have touched on the question of Libya before in this series, [in the item on Ruth First](#), which in turn is linked to a download from First's book on Gaddafi's Libya.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Muammar Gaddafi, The Green Book, Part 1, on Democracy, 1975](#) and [Muammar Gaddafi, The One-State Solution, 2009](#).**



[Issa Shivji](#)

## Issa Shivji

Issa Shivji has been a professor at the University Dar-es-Salaam for four decades. He is an African revolutionary intellectual of the first rank. Shivji provides our reading text for today: “The Struggle for Democracy and Culture” (attached).

Shivji has made the anti-Imperialist case very well, reminding us, among other things, that it is we freedom-fighters who are the humanists now, and it is the Imperialists who are the barbarians (a message that is also reinforced by Kenan Malik’s short, included piece about culture).

Issa Shivji’s address on The Struggle for Democracy and Culture explicitly and correctly claims, on behalf of the national-liberation and anti-colonial struggles, that this struggle - our struggle - carries, for the time being, the banner of progress for the whole world.

For a long time past, and into the future, until such time as the struggle for socialism again becomes the principal one, the National Democratic Revolutions taken together constitute the main vehicle for human progress, bearing up and rescuing all that is noble and fine in humanity.

The bourgeoisie is a thieving class and it will steal the clothes of the revolutionaries without any hesitation if it sees the smallest, most temporary advantage in doing so. The Imperialist bourgeoisie wishes to reverse the appearance of its shameful past and of its hopeless future. It wishes to claim the moral superiority that the liberation movement has, and steal it.

Issa Shivji shows very clearly how this monstrous fraud is attempted. The constant Imperialist droning about “good governance” is the extreme of hypocrisy, coming as

it does from the worst oppressors in history – the force that has taken oppression to the ends of the earth. Read Shivji. He tells it well. But also note the hypocritical machinations of our present South African anti-communists, including but not limited to, the DA. If you did not know better, you could believe from what you read that it was liberal whites who liberated South Africa from the old regime.

Let me repeat: the struggle for democracy is ours, not theirs. The struggle for freedom is ours. We are the humanists now. We, the liberationists, are the bearers of the best of human history and we have been so for many decades past. The 20th Century was the liberation century, the anti-Imperial century. That was when we overtook the others in politics, in morality, and in philosophy - but we were only starting. In the 21st Century we will finish the job.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Shivji, Struggle for Democracy, 2003](#), with [Malik, Struggle for Culture, 2002](#).
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#### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 9a



Young [Samir Amin](#)

## Samir Amin

[Samir Amin](#) is an African Revolutionary Writer born in Egypt, fluent in French, often published in English, and a scholar who has illuminated the revolutionary potential and the revolutionary imperative for half a century in Africa.

The downloadable text below, coming from an article in Al Ahram, begins with the following statement, unfortunately no less true today than when it was written in 2003: *“The United States is governed by a junta of war criminals...”*

This article is a thorough-going denunciation, but also a scientific and very well-informed analysis of US society and history, contained in only four pages. It is also a call to arms.

Samir Amin is a living example of the moral and humanist clarity that is characteristic of the African Anti-Imperialist intellectual cadre. According to Wikipedia he has written more than 30 books.

He remains a stalwart.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Samir Amin, 2004, The American Ideology](#).

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#### African Revolutionary Writers, Part 9b



Ahmed Ben Bella with Gamal Abdel Nasser

## Ahmed Ben Bella

[Ahmed Ben Bella](#) was an Algerian Revolutionary and freedom fighter, 3<sup>rd</sup> President of Algeria (1963-1965), born in 1918, who died in 2012.

The main downloadable document linked below is an interview with Ben Bella done in 2006.

Of course it would be preferable to have a political pamphlet, speech, or article for a theoretical journal written by the comrade's own hand. But this interview is a good substitute.

You will see that Ben Bella interacted with both Cabral and Mandela. Says Ben Bella:

*“Mr. Mandela and Mr. Amilcar Cabral themselves came to Algeria. It’s me who coached them; afterwards they returned to lead the fight for freedom in their countries. For other movements, which were not involved in a military fight and who needed only political support, such as Mali, we helped in other ways.”*

You will see that Che Guevara was also there at one stage.

In 2003, Ben Bella went into action again and was elected to lead the International Campaign Against Aggression on Iraq. We all failed to stop that war. Ben Bella, old as he already was, did more than most.

Viva, Ben Bella, Viva!

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Ahmed Ben Bella, People's Liberation Unachieved, 2006](#).

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African Revolutionary Writers, Part 9c



[Gamal Abdel Nasser, 1918-1970](#)



# Gamal Abdel Nasser

Gamal Abdel Nasser was the leader of the Free Officers' revolution in Egypt in 1952 which deposed the king and established a republic. He subsequently became President of that African country until his death in 1970. Nasser was a giant figure in the liberation movement, the anti-colonial and anti-Imperialist movement, and in the [Non-Aligned Movement](#).

Nasser was a famous orator in the golden age of the transistor radio, and could be heard by that means in streets as well as in homes throughout the Arabic-speaking world in those days, and all over Africa. Our main linked item below is a speech that Nasser made just over a month prior to the 1956 imperialist invasion of his country – an invasion which failed, and was repulsed.

Egypt under President Nasser had nationalised the Suez Canal. The Imperialist countries responded with threats – as the linked, downloadable speech relates.

France, Britain and Israel finally mounted a military attack on Egypt on 29 October 1956, in what is known in those countries as the “[Suez Crisis](#)”. This confrontation ended in a reversal for the imperialists, consolidated the republic, and established Egypt's sovereignty over the canal on its territory, forever.

The operation resembled the 2011 aggression against Libya in many ways, but especially in the demonization of President Nasser that preceded it. But now, as Wikipedia says:

*“Nasser is seen as one of the most important political figures in both modern Arab history and politics in the 20th century. Under his leadership, Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal and came to play a central role in anti-imperialist efforts in the Arab World and Africa. The imposed ending to the Suez Crisis made him a hero throughout the Arab world.”*

This is how Nasser began this 1956 speech:

*“In these decisive days in the history of mankind, these days in which truth struggles to have itself recognized in international chaos where powers of evil domination and imperialism have prevailed, Egypt stands firmly to preserve her sovereignty. Your country stands solidly and staunchly to preserve her dignity against imperialistic schemes of a number of nations who have uncovered their desires for domination and supremacy.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Gamal Abdel Nasser, Speech on Suez, 15 September 1956](#).



Kwame Nkrumah, 1909 - 1972

## Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is one of the very greatest of the African Revolutionary writers, as well as being the independence leader and the first democratic president of his country, Ghana.

Of the two Nkrumah downloads **attached**, the first covers major parts of his 1965 work "Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism". At the end of this book Nkrumah wrote:

*"I have set out the argument for African unity and have explained **how this unity would destroy neo-colonialism in Africa**. In later chapters I have explained how strong is the world position of those who profit from neo-colonialism. Nevertheless, African unity is something which is within the grasp of the African people. The foreign firms who exploit our resources long ago saw the strength to be gained from acting on a Pan-African scale. By means of interlocking directorships, cross-shareholdings and other devices, groups of apparently different companies have formed, in fact, one enormous capitalist monopoly. The only effective way to challenge this economic empire and to recover possession of our heritage, is for us also to act on a Pan-African basis, through a Union Government."*

In the year following the publication of this revolutionary book, and while he was on a visit to China and Vietnam, Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown as President in a military *coup d'état* organised by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This was in 1966.

## **“African Socialism”**

In 1967 Nkrumah spoke at a seminar in Cairo, Egypt, in strong opposition to the “Negritude” philosophy of Leopold Senghor, and against the generally phony false-flag product called “African Socialism”. The second attached document is a transcript of this input.

From the time of Eduard Bernstein with his 1899 book “[Evolutionary Socialism](#)”, and of Rosa Luxemburg’s classic 1900 response to Bernstein, “[Reform or Revolution?](#)”, the same question has often been repeated.

In the history of the struggle for liberation from colonialism in Africa, the question “Reform or Revolution?” was once again inevitably put.

The neo-colonialists wanted to sound better and to deceive the people more easily. So a false kind of reformist “Socialism”, not very different from Bernstein’s kind, but now calling itself “African Socialism” was widely deployed as a smokescreen for neo-colonialism, from soon after the dawn of African Independence in the 1950s and 1960s.

Some of the appeals for “African Socialism” were more honest than others. The late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere is still respected, and we will look at some of Nyerere’s writing next. After Nyerere, we will look at the self-referential and self-isolating case of Thomas Sankara. Finally we will look at [Walter Rodney](#), who commented upon Nyerere’s “Ujamaa” concept of socialism, as well as on underdevelopment as a deliberate act of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Hence we will end our series with the following two questions still open:

1. What is Socialism and why do we need it?
2. How do we achieve African unity and thereby defeat Imperialism?

Kwame Nkrumah was the greatest of the advocates of revolutionary Pan-African unity against Imperialism. His clear intention was to destroy neo-colonialism. For this reason it is fitting that Osagyefo’s writing takes the position of main text in this, the final part of our African Revolutionary Writers’ Series, of which the point is to change the world in the particular way that Nkrumah advocated, i.e. to do away with neo-colonialism.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Kwame Nkrumah, Neo-colonialism, 1965, Compilation](#) and [Kwame Nkrumah, African Socialism Revisited, 1967](#).**



[Julius Nyerere, 1922-1999](#)

## Julius Nyerere

In his 1962 pamphlet, *Ujamaa – the Basis of African Socialism*, Nyerere begins: “Socialism – like democracy – is an attitude of mind.”

This was a few months after the Independence of Tanganyika, and Julius Nyerere was the country’s first President.

“African Socialism” was mostly a swindle, but here, probably, and also in the opinion of Ngugi wa Thiong’o as we have seen, Julius Nyerere was expressing a conviction held in good faith.

Nyerere believed that socialism was an attitude of mind, perhaps comparable to the imaginary “milk of human kindness”. He believed that socialism was entirely a subjective condition.

We will ponder, in the case of Thomas Sankara, the assassinated president of Burkina Faso, whether such a subjective kind of socialism, which Sankara also espoused, and which is neither rooted in science nor in international solidarity, is not always doomed to defeat.

Julius Nyerere was respected by relatively-more-scientific socialists like Ngugi for the remainder of his life, and under Nyerere's leadership his country played a heroic role as a front-line state against Apartheid, Portuguese and Rhodesian colonialism.

Walter Rodney also apologised for Nyerere in his 1972 essay, “Tanzanian *Ujamaa* and Scientific Socialism” ([click here](#)). Rodney thought that *Ujamaa* was *de facto* revolutionary, if not consciously so.

Tanganyika combined with Zanzibar in 1964 to become Tanzania. As Tanzania it was host to many liberation movements and from the late 1970s was host to the ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. As Tanzania it adopted the famous Arusha Declaration of 1967. These things are major parts of the dual history of socialist ideas in Africa, and of pan-African solidarity.

Read these two documents to discover part of Tanzania's struggle with the meaning of socialism in circumstances where almost the entire population was made up of peasants.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa - The Basis of African Socialism, 1962](#), and [Julius Nyerere, Arusha Declaration, 1967](#).
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[Thomas Sankara, 1949-1987](#)

## Thomas Sankara

As we said in relation to Huey Newton, the reading of the original words of political leaders is apt to result in a re-evaluation of the received opinions about writers. In the case of Thomas Sankara, the revision is downwards.

Sankara is the legendary President of Burkina Faso, immortalised in the book [“Thomas Sankara Speaks”](#), of which the attached document is an extract.

The only other document mentioned by Sankara in this speech, made shortly before his death in a coup organised by his comrade [Blaise Compaore](#), is his own [Political Orientation Speech](#) of 2 October 1983, allegedly (according to Wikipedia) written by another comrade, [Valère Somé](#).

Compaore was President of Burkina Faso until 2014, 28 years after the coup that killed Sankara. Valère Somé survived as an oppositionist.

The “Political Orientation Speech” was given soon after the *coup d’état* of 1983 that first brought Sankara and Compaore to power. It is a kind of *ad hoc* statement of good intentions. It quotes no antecedents.

Otherwise the speech of 4 August 1987 (“Revolution is a Perpetual Teacher”) is all generalisation. No other political figures are quoted, no events, no specific projects. It is not like the speech of a president. It is all exhortation.



Every assertion is hedged with a counter-assertion.

At times Sankara indicates that he is about to go into details, but then he does not do so. At times he says we must learn from other revolutions, but he mentions none. Other African countries are not mentioned other than in the salutations at the beginning and the end.

We have all heard such empty speeches. They are called “clap-trap”.

The organisations mentioned are all of the top-down kind.

The peasants, who surely would have comprised a large part of his audience, are insulted from the start.

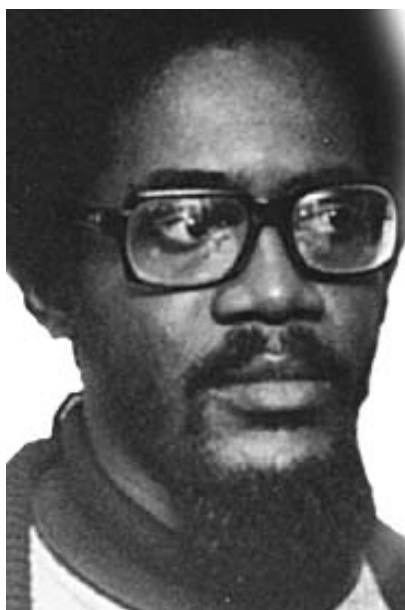
There is paranoia in this speech. When you read it, you can suspect that Sankara already had fears that were born out when he was couped and murdered on 15 October 1987, less than three months later.

There is no actual politics. It all reduces to appeals to strive for happiness and dignity. The mass agency of which Sankara is proud to boast is overwhelmed by the “persuasion” that the proposed vanguard is meant to exercise.

It is necessary to read all, but this one is a shocking discovery. The great Sankara, with such a romantic image and such a huge following, even today, turns out to be a revolutionary fraud.

The next writer, Walter Rodney, our last, was not a fraud.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Thomas Sankara, Revolution is a perpetual teacher, 1987](#).**
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[Walter Rodney, 1942 - 1980](#)

## Walter Rodney

[Walter Rodney](#) was a revolutionary intellectual, born in Guyana, who is also eternally associated with the Dar-es-Salaam University school of African Revolutionary Writers, of which we have already featured two others in this series, namely Issa Shivji and Mahmood Mamdani.

Rodney was assassinated in his birthplace of Georgetown, on 13 June 1980, while running for office in Guyanese elections.

There is another biography of Walter Rodney [here](#).

The downloadable text linked below is a 4-page extract from the 44-page Chapter Six of Walter Rodney's "[How Europe Underdeveloped Africa](#)". The entire book can be downloaded in PDF format [by clicking here](#) (1069 KB).

More writings of Walter Rodney are available in the MIA [Walter Rodney Archive](#). In particular, the following five articles are recommended:

- [Tanzanian Ujamaa and Scientific Socialism](#), 1972
- [The African Revolution](#), 1972
- [Marxism and African Liberation](#), 1975
- [Class Contradictions in Tanzania](#), 1975
- [International Class Struggle in Africa, the Caribbean and America](#), 1975

“How Europe Underdeveloped Africa” made a huge impact when it was first published. It still continues to have legendary status among the African Revolutionary writings, and rightly so.

Rodney marshals the facts and the literature and he makes the arguments. He takes on Imperialist theories of “underdevelopment” head-on, and he overturns them.

Bourgeois theorists and academics, to the surprise of the naïve among us, proceeded to ignore Rodney after his death, and to revert to even more reactionary theories than before in their universities. Hence the importance of maintaining the currency of this literature, and keeping the dialogue around it fresh, in a virtual University, or Republic of Letters.

The late Walter Rodney was himself a scholar of the literature that we have attempted to revisit, and sample, in this CU African Revolutionary Writers Series. This is apparent from the essays that are in the Walter Rodney Archive, linked above. Rodney is a very good example for us. Rodney gives his reflections on the historic place of many of our chosen African Revolutionary Writers, including Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, as you will see if you read these essays.

Not only did he have his own ideas, but he also knew where they fitted in relation to past writers, and to contemporary writers. As an example of this, the essay “International Class Struggle in Africa, the Caribbean and America” is given, prepared like all the other files for printing as a booklet, in this case 20 pages.

This essay was written in preparation for a 6<sup>th</sup> Pan African Congress, in the tradition of the ones organised by the likes of W E B du Bois and George Padmore. The 6<sup>th</sup> Pan African Congress was supposed to take place in Tanzania. Whether it did, or not, the CU does not know. The essay is full of class analysis, and comparisons are drawn between African struggles and struggles in other places and times. Among other things, Walter Rodney wrote, 40 years ago, and 17 years after 1958:

*“The African radicals of 1958 are by and large the incumbents in office today. The radicals of today lead at best an uncomfortable existence within African states, while some languish in prison or in exile. The present petty bourgeois regimes would look with disfavour at any organized programme which purported to be Pan-African without their sanction and participation.”*

There is a great deal in this essay about the petty-bourgeois nature of the new independent regimes. Rodney writes that “the petty bourgeoisie during this early

stage of the independence struggle constituted a stratum or fraction within the international bourgeoisie”.

The works of Walter Rodney can serve well to conclude our series, as a critical summing up by an eminent scholar as well as by a leader and revolutionary martyr.

Viva, Walter Rodney, Viva!

Viva all the African Revolutionary Writers, Viva!

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Walter Rodney, Colonialism, System for Underdeveloping Africa, C6, 1973](#) and [International Class Struggle in Africa, the Caribbean and America, 1975](#).
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**Course: African Revolutionary Writers**

**20002, African Revolutionary Writers, Introductions Booklet 2 of 2**

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